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ABSTRACT

This digest addresses two components in the moral and ethical preparation of teachers: identification and assessment of professional ethical concepts and structures in teacher education, and foundations and specific models for the preservice training of teachers of character. A teacher's first moral obligation is to provide excellent instruction. Teachers with high levels of moral professionalism have a deep obligation to help students learn and to demonstrate their moral professionalism. Teachers' professional ethical dispositions must now be addressed as part of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation process. Four components of ethical education include: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. Each component is clearly defined, and educational goals, teaching strategies and assessment methods can be derived from those definitions. Professionals in education need objective knowledge about how children form a basic sense of right and wrong and how schools can reinforce appropriate development. An appropriate classroom environment can enhance students' positive dispositions if teachers receive proper training. The digest highlights three teacher education programs offering students the knowledge and professional skills to integrate character education into classroom practices. It concludes that moral and ethical issues, including character education, are slowly becoming part of teacher education programs, with deans and administrators of teacher education programs agreeing that core values can and should be taught in schools. (Contains 21 references). (SM)

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DIGEST

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Moral and Ethical Issues in Teacher Education

Jacques S. Benninga

This ERIC digest will address two components related to the moral and ethical preparation of teachers. First it will consider issues related to the identification and assessment of professional ethical concepts and structures in teacher education, and then it will address foundations and specific models for the preservice training of teachers of character.

Issues of Professional Ethics in Education

Consider Irma, the student teacher. Not only does she already have a contract from the rural district in which she was born and raised, she is also bilingual. Irma wants to live in the community and teach in the elementary school in which she was taught. She has a natural rapport with children and a positive personality.

As the student teaching semester progresses, Irma's Master Teacher Mrs. Baxter grows increasingly uncomfortable. Irma is enrolled in a full set of courses during the student teaching semester and works 30-40 hours a week. Her relationship with her boyfriend is serious and takes additional time. Because of this busy schedule, it is difficult for Irma and Mrs. Baxter to meet to discuss the classroom curriculum and review teaching plans. Mrs. Baxter offers to meet with Irma before class, at 7:00 a.m., but Irma has difficulty getting to school that early because of her late night hours at work. Meetings between the two are sporadic.

Mrs. Baxter has noticed other behaviors that bother her about Irma. For example, she has observed that on the playground Irma watches the students, but does not actively interact with them. In the computer room, Irma searches the web, but does not help the children. She has asked Irma to prepare a theme unit and has given her time at school to prepare. But it is now three days before the unit is to begin and there are no plans and Irma has not discussed the unit with Mrs. Baxter. Mrs. Baxter feels that perhaps Irma is just "putting in time" because she knows she has a job waiting and the other facets of her life—her class work, her job, her boyfriend—have taken precedence.

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Irma's performance as a professional-in-training is inadequate. She's involved in many activities and has interests that compete with her professional preparation. Though Irma has potential, her behavior is "unprofessional" or even "professionally unethical". That is, if ethics is concerned with actions and practice, with what one ought to do (Pojman, pp. 1-2), then Irma's actions do not represent ethical behavior. Rather, they violate principles of professional ethics that should be part of her professional preparation. If professional ethics concerns, "those norms, values, and principles that should govern the professional conduct of teachers..." (Strike & Ternasky, p. 2), Irma flunks this part of her training. Her behavior violates the most basic principle of the NEA's Code of Ethics of the Education Profession (NEA, 2003)—Irma is not foundationally committed to her students.

A teacher's first moral obligation is to provide excellent instruction. Teachers with a high level of moral professionalism have a deep obligation to help students learn. According to Wynne (1995), teachers with that sense of obligation demonstrate their moral professionalism by:

- coming to work regularly and on time
- being well informed about their subject matter
- planning and conducting classes with care
- regularly reviewing and updating instructional practices
- cooperating with, or if necessary, confronting parents of underachieving students
- cooperating with colleagues and observing school policies so the whole institution works effectively
- tactfully but firmly criticizing unsatisfactory school policies and proposing constructive improvement

Though codes of ethics may not have played a significant role in teacher preparation programs in the past, (Strike & Ternasky, p. 3), professional ethical dispositions of teachers must now be addressed as part of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation process (NCATE, 2002).

A program of ethical education developed for dental professionals at the University of Minnesota more than 25 years ago is finding adaptations to other professional training programs, including the training of teachers (Rest & Narvaez, 1994). Called the Four-Component Model of Moral Maturity, the program assumes that moral behaviors are built on a series of component processes (Bebeau, Rest, & Narvaez, 1999). Each component is clearly defined, and educational goals, teaching strategies and assessment methods can be derived from those definitions. The components are:

1) *Moral sensitivity*, the awareness of how our actions affect other people. It involves being aware of the different lines of action and how each line of action affects the parties concerned. It involves knowing cause-consequent chains of events in the real world, and empathy and role-taking abilities.
2) *Moral judgment* is based on the work of Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1984) and involves intuitions about what is fair and moral. It requires adults to make moral judgments about complex human activities.
3) *Moral motivation* requires a prioritization of moral values over personal values, particularly in professional settings, and,
4) *Moral character* requires individuals to act on their moral convictions.

Training strategies which lend themselves to enhancing *moral sensitivity* may include role-playing exercises to sensitize pre-service teachers to professional dilemmas (like the one that began this essay) and related strategies to make professionals aware that their actions affect others. In addition, *moral judgment* training strategies might include the direct teaching of criteria for making professional moral judgments in cases involving informed consent, paternalism or breaches of confidentiality. For this component, reference should be made to the specific descriptions of prescribed actions found in professional codes of ethics.

Moral motivation training might include profession-specific service activities, and the study of professional moral exemplars (i.e., exemplary teachers); and *moral character* training might include strategies for problem solving and conflict resolution among and between children and adults (Bebeau, Rest & Narvaez, 1999).

Issues related to the moral and professional ethical education of teachers are the focus for several book-length treatments (e.g., Tom, 1984; Sockett, 1993; Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; and Goodlad & McMannon, 1997). It would seem that this is developing into an area of greater interest to the profession.

Understanding Foundations for Moral and Character Education

For most of history, the concept of character formation—the duty of the older generation to form the character of the young—has been a basic principle structuring moral education. For example, Aristotle (trans. 1962) wrote about the development of excellence, stating that to become excellent at any craft, including becoming virtuous, we have to exercise (practice) those behaviors. He stated: "We become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage. Hence, it is no small matter whether one habit or another is inculcated in us from early childhood; on the contrary, it makes...all the difference" (1962, pp. 34-35).

Clearly, the business world expects a basic understanding and practice of ethical behavior from its workers as they enter the workforce. David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, in their book *The Manufactured Crisis* (1995), report data collected from personnel directors of major industries. These employers were asked to list the five most important and the five least important skills needed by their employees. The surveys suggest that the habits and motivation of workers are more important to employers than the technical skills workers bring to their jobs. The authors conclude, "...if schools are truly to serve the needs of business, it appears they should concentrate...more on the values that students will need when they enter the workplace" (p. 89).

Professionals in education need objective knowledge about how children form a basic sense of right and wrong and what schools can do to reinforce appropriate development. William Damon,

author of *Greater Expectations* (1996), provides that foundation. He describes research that children thrive on accomplishment, not on empty self-esteem messages. They do not become overburdened by reasonable pressures related to worthwhile activities, including demanding homework. They are tough and resilient and are motivated to learn through both extrinsic inducements (e.g., high expectations, rewards, pressure, encouragement, grades, etc.) and intrinsic motivations. But they need the guidance that can best be provided by able, caring, concerned adults. Daniel Goleman, author of the highly acclaimed book *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), has documented the effects of positive and counter-productive child-rearing practices that result in either positive or anti-social behaviors. Many of these practices are related to teaching. Such at-risk behaviors as impulsiveness and belligerency, stubbornness and indecisiveness, overreaction to irritation, and inability to put off gratification are learned, and interfere with social and educational success, with what Goleman calls "mental clarity". Other dispositions, equally learned, are much more conducive to optimism and full maturity. These include a strong cultural work ethic, temperance, and the ability to cope with frustrations, optimism and empathy. An appropriate classroom environment can enhance these positive dispositions in children if teachers receive appropriate training.

It is no accident that some schools are more adept at addressing the moral development of their students. Better schools plan for virtue. The curriculum contains references to virtuous acts, and students are recognized and rewarded for virtuous behaviors. The school building is physically cared for and psychologically safe and teachers model exemplary character traits (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn & Smith, 2003). There is good communication between teachers and parents.

Exemplary Character Education Practices in Teacher Education

A recent publication by the Character Education Partnership (2002) highlighted details of a national survey of 600 deans of schools of education to determine what their institutions were doing to prepare future teachers in character education. Although 90% of the survey's respondents agreed that core values should be taught in schools, only 24.4% of the respondents reported that their institutions "highly emphasized" that content. However, the report identified three university teacher education programs offering students the knowledge and professional skills to integrate character education into classroom practices (p.8). Each will be described here.

Boston University. Character education is a theme running through Boston University's School of Education teacher preparation program. As freshmen, students take a "Cultural Foundations for Educators" class that focuses on the classics and the arts and interprets these works through a teaching/learning lens. As a culminating experience, students develop and present lessons at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts to groups of middle school students. The purpose of this experience according to the instructor, Steven Tinger, is to offer "future teachers a pedagogically reflective engagement with texts and other artifacts fundamental to American culture" (p 12). In their second semester students take an introduction to education class focusing on the moral responsibility of teachers to students, parents, colleagues and community members. Other classes include character education themes, and the School of Education formally inducts students into the profession at a special ceremony.

California State University, Fresno. Since 1999, the Kremen School of Education and Human Development, like Boston University, has formally inducted students into the teaching profession. Students begin the induction session with a discussion of an ethical dilemma and end the session with a choral recitation of the Educators' Affirmation, a pledge adapted from Tinger's work at Boston University. All student teacher supervisors meet regularly to discuss ethical issues that confront them as they supervise student teachers, often writing their own dilemmas for group discussions. The Kremen School's mission and vision statements attend to the professional ethical responsibilities of its students, and the School sponsors a yearly Conference on Character and Civic Education (now in its 20th year) for its student teachers. At that conference both faculty and community members present moral dilemmas from their professional work for discussion with students. Character education is the clear theme of that conference, as well as the work of several education-program cohorts. In one cohort, Early Childhood Education, faculty have initiated a long-term research project assessing students as they enter and exit the program, and infusing the curriculum with activities that enhance character and moral development. This research is based on the Four Component Model of Moral Maturity discussed earlier (Lane-Garon, 2003).

University of St. Francis. As a Catholic Franciscan University, the University of St. Francis has always included attention to values, ethics, and service. Character education is part of both the formal curriculum and the ethos of the College of Education. Several education classes examine moral development and ethics and the responsibilities of teachers as character educators while school- and campus-wide programs habituate students to service and community involvement. Service learning projects are required in students' cultural diversity courses.

Conclusion

It appears that moral and ethical issues, including character education, are slowly becoming part of teacher education programs. Philosophical writings and psychological research exist to provide guidance, and exemplary university training programs provide beginning models of practice. Overwhelmingly deans and administrators of teacher education programs agree that core values can and should be taught in our schools. It's now up to the profession to ensure broader and deeper implementation.

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